

COLOMBIA.

’ [“From an unpublished History of the Revolution and Wars of the Republic of Colombia ; with characteristic Anecdotes, and Biographical Sketches of the principal Chiefs of the two parties, and their secret intrigues, from the year 1808, to the end of 1823. By General H. L. Villeneuve Ducoudray Holstein.”*]

CHAPTER V.—*Character of the Inhabitants of the different Provinces of the Republic of Colombia ; their Manners, Habits, Customs, Festivals, &c.*

It has been already observed, that it was part of the colonial system of Spain, to keep the Americans in ignorance ; and that the government, which always feared that they might become too clear-sighted as to their actual situation, restricted within certain limits the diffusion of knowledge among them. The King alone signed the passports of all persons going to the South American provinces ; and the European Spaniard could only obtain them, by proving that the necessities of business required his departure, and undergoing a strict and humiliating exami-

* It is expected that a translation of this work will shortly be put to press in this city.

nation. It was extremely difficult for other Europeans to obtain this permission. The French alone, after the peace of Badajoz, were allowed to send certain agents or consuls, whose conduct was vigilantly observed. The Americans, who wished to visit Spain, were obliged to submit to the same formalities as the Spaniards ; so that the communication between the two countries was difficult and extremely limited.

It has also been said, that the clergy, and, in particular, the officers of the inquisition, powerfully seconded the views of the king, on whom they were entirely dependent ; and whose policy suited their interests, which were best maintained by the ignorance and superstition of the people.

In consequence of this system, the instruction of children was much neglected. At the age of four or five, boys were sent to the schools, and girls into convents. The manner in which females were educated will be spoken of hereafter ; we shall confine ourselves at present to that of the males. Education is as essential to the formation of character, as culture in the natural world ; and by the degree of care which is bestowed on children from their infancy, we may easily foretell their capacity, morality, and character in youth and manhood. It will be necessary to enter into some details, therefore, on the subject of education, in order to give a just idea of the character of the present generation of Colombians.

The schools, colleges, academies and universities were, and still are, for the most part, in the hands of the clergy and monks. These ecclesiastics stored the minds of children with wonderful and improbable tales of miracles, and extracts from the lives of the saints ; made them learn and recite by rote a multitude of Latin prayers, the meaning of which they did not understand ; taught them to sing litanies and masses ; and subjected them to external forms of devotion, which, by accustoming them so early to dissimulation and hypocrisy, left a void in the head and in the heart, which remained through after life.

On leaving school, they entered a college, where they were taught Latin and Greek, in an extremely superficial manner. Their memory was filled with abstruse and vague scholastic learning ; which made their course of study a mere formal observance, and their acquisitions trifling and unprofitable. Instead of being inspired with wholesome and pure moral principles, they were indoctrinated in the difference of ranks in society, in the advantages of being born of noble parents, or belonging to families in the service of the King or the church ; and thus filled with an idle self-love, and boundless vanity.

This course of instruction, if it may be so called, ordinarily terminated at the age of fifteen or sixteen years. Dr. Sanchez Caraquia, a man of great merit, makes the following remarks on the education of youth in Caraccas :

“This precipitancy in their studies proceeds from their ardour to acquire knowledge, and the want of method in its direction. Young persons who have commenced the study of the Latin tongue and of the liberal sciences, before they have been thoroughly taught their own language, or learnt the elements of arithmetic, return reluctantly, at a later age, to acquire what was neglected in their youth. They believe that all the sciences are contained in the Latin grammar of Nebrija, in the philosophy of Aristotle, the Institutes of Justinian, the *Curia Philippica*, and the theological treatises of Gouet and Larraga. When they are able to make extracts from these works, to read the mass, sport a doctor's diploma, or appear in the frock of a priest or a monk, they are sufficiently accomplished for any employment or profession. Their proper dignity, according to their ideas, forbids their following the pursuit of agriculture, and obliges them to hold all the mechanic arts in most sovereign contempt. When they assume the military costume, it is from pure ostentation. In making vile translations from the French language, they corrupt their own. Some devote themselves to the profession of the law, in order to gain a livelihood ; some enter into religious orders, to gain consideration and consequence ; and some make vows of poverty, precisely because they wish to escape from the actual poverty which pursues them. Every person, of any distinction, pretends to be an accomplished officer, capable of commanding regular troops ; without ever having thought of acquiring the knowledge which is necessary and indispensable in the profession of arms. There is not a man among the whites, whether such by origin, or by the effects of time and intermariages, who does not ardently desire to become either a lawyer, a priest, or a monk. Those whose aspirations are more humble, wish at least to be notaries, secretaries or scriveners, or to be attached to some religious community, as lay brothers, &c. It is for these reasons our fields are deserted ; while their fertility reproaches us with our sluggishness. The father of a labouring family is, with these people, an object of contempt. The desire of all is to become men of importance, and to lead a life of idleness ; and of too many, to give themselves up to disgusting vices, sensuality, gaming, fraud, and calumny. Lawsuits, therefore, multiply ; rogues prosper ; good men are discouraged ; and every thing is inclining to utter ruin.”

It should be remarked, that the writer, whose language we have borrowed, was one of those rare and gifted men, who, in a great measure, are formed by themselves. If he formed such an opinion of his countrymen, will it be thought that my pictures are overdrawn ? They are, unhappily, too faithful delineations.

In Caraccas, the title of Marquis, Count, Viscount, or Baron, was the *ne plus ultra* of human happiness ; to purchase which from the Spanish monarch, many of the inhabitants have been known to expend immense sums : others purchased orders and ribands ; for in Spain all things can be had for gold.

This passion was not as universal in the province of New Grenada as in that of Venezuela. You found there no Creole nobility ; those who came from Europe alone bearing titles ; while, in Caraccas, there were the *Mantuanos* families, of whom we shall say more hereafter, and who were entirely unknown at Santa Fé de Bogota. Artisans, mechanics and tradesmen, in consequence of this fondness for rank, were of course despised ; and the cultivation of the earth was left to people of colour and to slaves. For this reason it was, and still is the case, at Caraccas, that men of colour or blacks, only, are tailors, shoemakers, joiners, masons, carpenters, &c. It would be beneath a *Caraquin*, of good family, to be engaged in such abject occupations. He would believe himself dishonoured by any labour, by which he might make himself useful. He would rather adorn himself with a showy uniform or sacerdotal robe ; chant, or assist at mass ; obtain the title of Doctor, in order to rank among the privileged classes of society ; lead a life of debauch and idleness ; and leave to others the care of working for his maintenance.

This extreme vanity, the baleful result of principles imbibed in youth, was the source of numberless family quarrels, and of an absurd and childish jealousy. These disputes were often produced by mere trifles ; as was natural, where every one wished to be greater than his neighbour, and to be distinguished for birth, rank, titles or riches.

The government and the clergy saw this state of things with much pleasure ; and, instead of using their authority to produce reconciliations and quell these dissensions, found it more to their interest to foment them ; their motto being *dividendo regnare*, divide and conquer. Another class of society powerfully seconded the two former, in promoting these differences ; to wit, the crowd of advocates and men of the law, who abounded in the two provinces, and encouraged the parties to continue their suits ; having a good understanding among one another, by which they profited by the rage for litigation, to their own emolument, and the ruin of many families. Before the revolution, it was computed that the expense of every kind, arising from law suits, amounted, in Venezuela, to the enormous sum of a million and a half of dollars, and in New Grenada, to more than two millions in a year. This, of course, created a swarm of advocates, attorneys, notaries, scriveners, clerks, &c.

From such an education and such an absolute want of knowledge, and the means of acquiring it ; from the influence of the priests, and of the ardent climate of this country ; from the ease with which the common necessities of life can be procured,

at little expense, it is not to be wondered at that the Creole is generally inert, effeminate, ignorant, vain, haughty, and a slave to superstition. He loves passionately gaming, pleasure of every kind, excess, festivals, show, pomp and expense.

The games they like best are *montis*, *crabs*, pharo, and lotteries ; but above all, roulette. To the latter they are addicted in such a degree, that they forget to eat, drink and sleep. They stake handfuls of gold on a card, with the greatest unconcern. I have seen them venture five hundred doubloons on a single card. The house in Carthagena where this game was played, paid, in 1814, the sum of two thousand dollars a month, merely for the privilege of being opened, besides paying the officers of the police a heavy rent, and its assistants and servants. On every Sunday a splendid dinner was set, gratuitously, for the patrons of the establishment. The rooms were magnificently lighted, and refreshments of every kind were freely afforded every night ; so that the expenses amounted to at least three thousand dollars a month ; notwithstanding which, the three enterprising proprietors netted, in the same time, a clear gain of five thousand dollars.

As soon as a bull fight was announced, the large population of the two capitals of Bogota and Caraccas, and their environs, rushed thither in crowds, forgetting their customary meals, and braving the sun and rain, to arrive in good season for the barbarous and cruel spectacle. This is exactly like those of Spain. The same formalities, ceremonies, and barbarities are practised ; upon which we shall not dwell.

I have mentioned in chapter second, the cockpits and their proprietors. The latter paid an enormous sum to the king, for the exclusive privilege of a town or village. This savage amusement attracted large crowds ; and wagers, as high as two thousand doubloons, were sometimes made on the combat.

There are, undoubtedly, exceptions to the general character which I have given of this people. Well educated men were to be found at Caraccas and Santa Fé de Bogota, devoted to the study of languages, law, medicine and botany. Most of the rich men, however, particularly in Venezuela, were addicted solely to pleasure, and the luxuries of the table ; regularly consuming in these their whole revenue, and often exceeding it. It was rare to find any who laid up money, and provided for the future. When their cash was exhausted, they had recourse to the Catalans and Biscayens, the courtiers and usurers of the country, whose whole knowledge was confined to the values of gold and silver, and who were always ready to assist

their friends in distress, by lending them money at an interest of from fifty to eighty per cent, if they would give security, mortgage, pledge, &c. and comply with all the other formalities of usury. The Creole, thoughtless and careless, and perfectly acquainted with these men, would sing while he was signing away, in addition to the enormous interest, perhaps his future resources, and annual revenue.

Hence, these Catalans and Biscayens, who commonly arrived with but a small capital, amassed, in a few years, a considerable fortune. Yet they always lived so wretchedly, that the lowest of the Creoles would not have changed situations with them ; and they were always lamenting their poverty and the dearness of the times, while their coffers were overflowing. Their complaints increased with their wealth ; and their avarice knew no limit.

The young Creole of good family, on leaving his form at school, found himself already provided with a wife. He *himself* was scarcely consulted by his relations, in the choice of his future bride, in the selection of whom they regarded only birth, family connexions with the Spanish court, or the local authorities, fortune, &c. The bargain being concluded with the friends of the young lady, she was taken from the convent, where she had been enclosed since she was four years old, and married, at the age of twelve, to a young man of sixteen. It was no rare thing to find a couple whose joint ages did not exceed thirty years. It was, indeed, an amusing sight, to behold a beardless husband lending his arm to a wife of twelve or thirteen years, who was gravely saluted by the title of Madam, when hardly entitled to that of Miss. I knew a young and very pretty woman, of the province of Cumana, who had seven children living, at the age of eighteen. Another lady at Caraccas had a daughter of sixteen, who looked like the younger sister of her mother, who was only twenty-seven.

A couple of this unripe age, utterly inexperienced, and who have never had an opportunity of learning any thing about domestic management, are placed suddenly at the head of a large establishment, and surrounded with servants and parasites without number, who profit by the good cheer and good wine of the young master of the house. The greater his wealth and influence, the larger is the number of his friends and dependants. Having never learnt how to govern themselves, when they wish to direct their children, they are compelled to abandon them to the care of strangers ; for which reason their education is generally so much neglected and so imperfect.

Their domestic economy is commonly miserable and irregular. Married so young, they at first believe that they love each other, because their parents have taught them to believe so. They give themselves up to the excitement of the senses, which they mistake for love ; and when the novelty is over, their passion extinct, and their reason developed by time, they discover a frightful void of feeling, a dreadful ennui, and a thousand faults in each other. They become petulant, and begin to quarrel, and to hate each other cordially ; and finally separate. The husband amuses himself abroad, and the wife consoles herself for his loss in some other manner. They would willingly be divorced, did they not fear to submit to formalities, humiliating to the parties, in which the evidence of their shame and dishonour must be publicly given by its witnesses. Pride, and not reason, prevents the legal dissolution of their union.

Either the difference of character and manners, or the influence of a more temperate and colder climate, may be assigned as the reason, that the young ladies of Bogota generally marry at a less early age than those of Caraccas, and that their union is happier, and more lasting. The rejoicings on such occasions, the balls and dinners, last generally eight days, according to the rank and wealth of the young couple. What may seem singular, is, that they scarcely ever make parties of pleasure to visit the country ; because, as has been observed, they despise every thing connected with agriculture, as beneath their dignity.

Such marriages, in which children have before their eyes the father's irregularities, and the mother's intrigues, can only prove pernicious examples, and schools of iniquity for the members of the family. Vice descended from generation to generation ; children wished to act as men, and assumed consequence as such, without either the moral or physical ability to support their pretensions ; and men who had passed their youth in excess, found their vigour gone, and became exhausted and enervated, at a period when others are just commencing the active duties of life. A host of maladies attacked them at once ; their pale and emaciated appearance told a tale of pain and suffering, in the midst of all the advantages afforded by rank, fortune, and a delicious climate ; their decay was visible to the eyes of all ; they became mere walking spectres, and descended to the grave, cursing the errors, and regretting the termination of a life cut short before the age of forty years.

The distinctions of society before the revolution, were well defined, and the different classes kept rigidly separated. The first consisted of members of the *real audiencia*, over which the

vice-roy or captain general presided—(See chapter 2d.)—of generals, sub-governors, the intendant, the treasurer, inspectors of different kinds of arms, of colonels, and the clergy of high rank. This first class consisted only of Spaniards. The second consisted of the native families of the country, distinguished for their wealth and illustrious birth. In New Grenada, there was no designation or specific name to distinguish them from the other inhabitants. Speaking of one of this class they would say, “he is of a very good family.” But in Venezuela they were called *las familias Mantuanos*, a term implying that they were more elevated, more exalted than the others. This was a kind of American nobility, ordinarily mingled with European blood, either Spanish or French. The third class comprised judges, municipal officers, military officers, from a lieutenant colonel to an ensign, and those employed under the orders of government, among whom might be found many Creoles. The fourth was formed of merchants, all persons engaged in commerce, and proprietors who were not *Mantuanos*. All these were whites : the remaining classes were composed of Indians, coloured people &c.

[We have given as long an extract from the fifth chapter of this work, as our limits permit. The writer, it will be remembered, is here speaking of society in Colombia, prior to the revolution. The view is unfavourable ; but for this we are not responsible. We merely publish the foregoing as a specimen of a work yet unpublished. In this same number we continue the remarks of a gentleman of this city, on the same subject, which were commenced in our first number.]
